

FEEDBACK

FEEDFORWARD

An Open Letter from the Media Equipment Pool

Fall 1971 308 Park Ave. 244-1259



Many of you know something about us by now. You may have worked with us, used our equipment, seen us shooting or playing tapes at some local event or been shot at yourself. You may have seen us at the Cable-TV hearings of the Monroe County Legislature's Committee, advocating open-access community channels on the cable, and financing of community production resource centers to program them. Or you may have heard rumblings about our existence through your contacts with schools, media, museums, arts or community organizations in town. This is an Open Letter to the Rochester community about who we are, where we came from, what we've been doing, and what we're dreaming of doing. At your end, relate what you hear from us here to your own dreams and schemes, and feed-back where you think we can help each other.

IN THE BEGINNING....

A New York City group named Videofreex proposed the Mediabus project to the New York State Council on the Arts. The idea was to travel across the state introducing people to video. The State Council, excited about the possibilities of video as a relevant art medium of high access, built onto Mediabus the idea of regional equipment pools, which would make video resources available to people on a more continuing basis. The Rochester Museum and Science Center agreed to be a sponsor for the Videofreex' Mediabus project and a location for the beginning of a Rochester Media Equipment Pool, and in June 1971 a grant was born. The RMSC contributed the first floor of a house at 308 Park Avenue, and the Media Equipment Pool began accumulating equipment ('hardware') and people who could use it and teach others to use it ('software').

WHAT WE'VE BEEN DOING

Most of the video activity of the first months has consisted of workshops in the use of the equipment, and short-term loans to individuals and groups who have experimented with various uses of video: information-gathering, documentation, instruction, drama, video environment, artistic

NON-PROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT 1746
Rochester, N. Y.

expression, and abstract electronic feedback. Some people are into "process" the experience of recording and seeing yourself (substitute: seeing your group) at the same moment or afterwards. This might sound narcissistic at first, but the effects are powerful. (see SOME PROCESS PROJECTS) Other people have created "products"--i.e., finished edited tapes designed to communicate something to others. (see our Tape-Log)

A DEMOCRATIC MEDIUM

One of the nice things about video is the possibility of combining process and product. We're evolving an ethic of television which approaches people and information differently from the strictly product-oriented mass-media approach we've all been raised on. In this ethic, television is produced for real purposes, by the people who are involved, for an audience of whomever they want to get their message across to. Members of the Equipment Pool consult and give technical support to these producers, but the choices of what to shoot, how to edit, and the planning of playback and feedback situations are the responsibility of the producer. (One implication of this approach for Cable-TV is that legal liability for the content of programming must rest with the individual producer and not the cable station or the franchise owner. This will protect us from the super-censorship of broadcast TV and insure responsible programming.) And in this ethic, the people in front of the camera are as important as those behind it. Nobody is exploited for his appeal to the broad audience "out

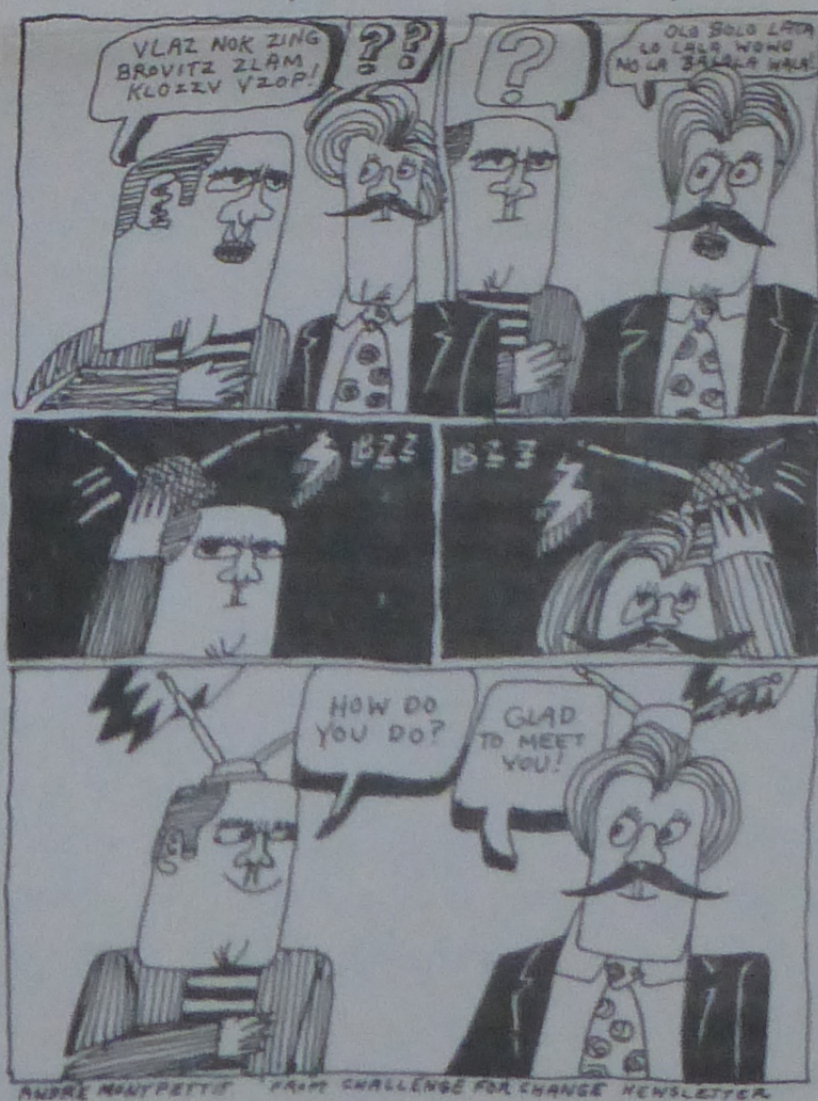


there in TV land" (substitute 'newspaper-land', 'radio-land', etc.). When we shoot, we inform people of our identity and purpose, and we request their permission. We try to always play back the tape right away, so people can see themselves before others see them. If they don't like how they look or what they said, we can erase that part of the tape. When we show the tape to others, we encourage them to respond on tape, building an on-going dialogue.... "process" rather than just "product" again. We feel that these open approaches to television have important implications for how we want to use Cable when we

have it to use it rather than be used by it, to be active producers rather than passive receivers, to be involved in processes of dialogue rather than polarized by traditional news and public affairs approaches.

SOME DREAMS

We have a lot of ideas about more ambitious projects we'd like to try, many of them models for community programming on CableTV. We'd like to do month long loans to schools, libraries, drop-in centers, and neighborhood organizations, so they could really build their own media consciousness and media skills. We want to train many specialized production units.... Blacks, Spanish-speaking, kids, women, students teachers, old folks.... who can make their own programs for audiences of their own choosing. We want to train audiences too, by setting rotating video theaters for continuous playback in places where congregate.... shopping plazas and waiting rooms, for example. We want to research the need and feasibility of expanding to other media, like slides, audio tape and films. We want to use video for COMMUNITY DIALOGUE, to open up the problem solving process be-



fore people become polarized, and allow for open exchange of information and ideas (which should be happening now about the cable franchise, for example, and yet few people know what's going on). And we want to use video for Media-tion, when necessary, to enable opposing groups to articulate their feelings and needs on tape and build communication loops between people who cannot communicate person-to-person. We can try to use tape to put all kinds of people back in touch with each other.... electronically at first.... and attempt to bridge those gaps which are tearing us all

apart. Well, we said they were dreams.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

We're now at the point where we've helped generate a much greater consciousness and demand for video than we can possibly meet. Now we need to develop democratic systems to determine media access priorities. And we need to strengthen our ties with other people in the community who share our dreams and who can help us become an effective community resource. To do this, we're forming an Advisory Committee. We have planned an exploratory meeting and invited several people who have worked with us so far. We are still open to suggestions, so please call us at 244-1259 right away if you are interested. (If no answer, ask for Gail Lynden at 271-4320.)

SOME PROCESS PROJECTS

KIDS & SCHOOLS

Equipment has been borrowed for consumer education, Mormon teacher training, and special education at the Forman Center.

Roger Bailey, an art teacher at Irondequoit High, used tape with his students for exercises in visual perception.

We're working with one of the teaching teams at Interim Junior High, helping them to use tape for evaluation of themselves.

Harry L. Thompson, Director of the Urban Education Planning office, asked us to tape a two-day Human Relations Workshop-Study Session before school opened. Later, he and his staff watched the tapes for self-evaluation. Several days after the violent outbreaks at Franklin High School, when Mr. Thompson was speaking to the Recruit Class at the Police Academy, he showed a portion of tape from the Work Study Session which showed a policeman arguing across a table with some Black and Spanish-speaking people. We taped the ensuing discussion, in which the Recruits revealed some of their attitudes about racial minorities, students, police and themselves. They gave us permission to show these tapes, pending the approval of Commissioner Mastrella. The Commissioner and his staff viewed the tapes with Harry Thompson the following week, and out of this session came a proposal for an experimental human relations course to be built into the police training curriculum.

ANKH NEIGHBORHOOD MUSEUM

Charles McGill, RMSC Community Coordinator, taped experimental workshops on ecology, astronomy, and Black History

and crafts given to youth at ANKH by RMSC staff. The tapes were used to evaluate the workshops, and became part of the following days exhibit. Plans are afoot to tape a special Underground Railroad/Communications Research Project, neighborhood cultural events, and people-on-the-street. ANKH hopes to be a video theatre and a rap center for Community Cable issues.

WOMEN

We are working with various parts of the Women's Movement, creating materials for exchange among women and for women's courses in high schools and colleges.

The Presbytery's Task Force on Women wrote and acted "Women's Work." They presented the tape along with a written report and recommendations at a gaming session where fourteen task forces negotiated and ranked all their proposals for Presbytery priorities. The Women's Task Force taped their reactions after the event. These are excerpts:



"The videotape really set a tone as far as women were concerned, in a way that we couldn't have done if we had just stood there and said, 'This is what we want and this is why we want it.'"

"I think that video raised the consciousness of the men there."

"Well it was a sort of a feeling of closeness, because I had come from a 1,000 miles away.... and I see the same things at work.... And there's the strength, that there are those commonalities, and it really made the word 'sisterhood' have meaning."

"It was a new experience for a lot of women.. for me... to be in a position where we could really influence people."

"I have a new respect for the process and for the people who function here, because I saw men coming around to us, responding to us as persons in a way that I don't think they would have done before. With the help of video and the kind of things that were in our report, we were unignorable."

SOME TECHNICAL NOTES

The equipment in the Equipment Pool is Sony AV-Series half-inch videotape recorders. We have four small portable battery-operated machines which can record anywhere and playback on any TV set.

For recording where portability is not required we have two larger decks which have editing capability.

The machines are easy to use after a half-hour of instruction. One complaint we have with the portapacks is that they are too delicate for the use we put them to. We've been having about 30% down time, and for serious breakdown, we send the equipment to Buffalo or Sony in New York. When the equipment works, the results are excellent; the picture is as good as what you receive on your home TV set. Editing is done by electronic transfer, and produces some deterioration in quality as well as instability at the edit points.

Another problem we have is distributing the software (the information recorded on the tape) to wide audiences. Half-inch video is incompatible with broadcast television standards, so TV stations refuse to put it on the air. There have been stations in other cities, however, which broadcast half-inch material by aiming their studio camera at a monitor connected to a half-inch playback deck, or by broadcasting a 16mm film which is produced from the half-inch video, a process we're now investigating. At this point in the technology there's a trade-off between technical perfection and immediacy of content. Cable-TV gives us this choice, and is an ideal distribution method for half-inch. Cable has better reception, a wider range of possible channels, and the capacity to play half-inch directly. In addition, there is some pressure, though no firm requirements from the Federal Communications Commission yet, for cable companies to originate local programming and provide community access. In Canada and in some American cities, local programming consists of the kind of material people are producing at the Equipment Pool. In other cities, local programming consists of continuous shots of a clock, a barometer, a wind speed indicator, a wind direction indicator, and a thermometer. And sometimes an old movie.

SOMETHING ABOUT FUNDING

Seed money for the Equipment Pool was provided by a grant, but we can't count on continued support from the New York State Council on the Arts or the Rochester Museum and Science Center after June 30. We

have begun to think of ways to make the project support itself, and may incorporate as a

non-profit community resource. We can continue to apply for grants, and can develop proposals with local agencies who use our services. We have also initiated a modest fee schedule, which won't by any means make us self-supporting but at least helps towards equipment maintenance and gets people used to the idea of budgeting for communications.



Production:

Equipment rental (individuals)	\$5 daily
(organizations)	\$10 daily
Crew (if needed)	\$15/person/session
Tape (half hours)	\$20 new
	\$10 recycled
(We will buy back tapes for recycling at the same \$10)	
Editing	\$5 daily

Screenings:

Equipment rental	\$5 basic (1 monitor)
Crew (if needed)	same as above
Most tapes in the library will be loaned free unless admission is charged at screenings.	
The prices are for those who can pay them. We encourage people and groups without money to use our equipment, as media access is needed most by those who have always been excluded from it, notably those without money.	

OPEN HOUSE

Thursday nights from 7:30 til ? is Open House at Media House (308 Park Ave. between Goodman & Oxford). It's an unstructured event which ranges from playing with video environments in one room to heavy communications raps in another. People who have daytime jobs come to learn to use the equipment and see what it's about. People who've been working with video and other media at the Equipment Pool, the colleges, and other places come to 'show and tell'. We exchange information, critique each other's work, and hatch new plans and projects. We'll be showing tapes we get by exchange with video groups in other cities, and we will probably begin to structure the evenings more and invite specific people for specific subjects. We don't want to become a video "clique." New people and ideas are welcome.. come try us out or phone first to see if we know what we will be doing on that night.

MEDIA EQUIPMENT POOL PEOPLE:

Bonnie Klein	Josh Kardon
Gail Lyndon	Larry Gale
David Christoff	Sandy Rockowitz
	Mike Brisson

TAPE-LOG#1

Please Post and feel free to copy any part of this tape-log in your own communications. The log keeps growing, so call for current information & let us know where to send up-dates.

ENTERTAINMENT

"A Night at the Planetarium"

A special performance at the Strassenburgh Planetarium. Tim Clark on the Moog & Elizabeth Clark dancing behind a screen, Pablo Lights, and percussion group Nexus.

"Lennon & Ono, This is Not Here"

Press conference in Syracuse at Yoko's exhibit at the Everson Art Gallery.

"Sue & Nancy" (2 reels)

Duet with flute and string bass.

"Portable Playground"

An incredible group of neighborhood kids singing playing at a playground designed by Shelia Berkley at the Rochester Memorial Art Gallery.

"Parson's Non-Verbal"

Video freex stop at N.Y.C.'s Parson's School of Design - an experiment in non-verbal communication.

"The Media Bus Story", "Videofreex at Home", (Laughing & Crying, I saw myself on TV last night, Searchin).

Activities of Videofreex, Inc.

COMMUNITY EVENTS

"Urban League: Project Uplift"

Black youth talent and fashion show.

"Festival of Nations" (4 reels)

An ethnic fair sponsored by the Rochester Museum & Science Center. from WXXI.

"Puerto Rican Festival"

Produced by the Ibero-American Action League.

"Teen League's Festival... Mendon Ponds"

COMMUNITY ACTION

"ANKH #3"

Prod. by Charles McGill at the neighborhood Museum, discussion on Franklin Jr. High with 4 black female students.

"ANKH #5"

East High Class.. Black History, Ex-Attica Inmate Ben Jackson, Delco Session, Workshop on Black Craftsmen.

"Urban Education Workshop - Study Session"

2-day workshop of community leaders, clergy, students, school sentries, school consultants, teachers and city police.

"Police Recruits" (4 reels)

Harry Thompson's seminar with Recruit Class at Police Academy.

"Farm Worker's Meeting" (3 reels)

Produced by Western Monroe Farm Workers Project & the Office of Human Development. 3 meetings in which migrant workers organize and negotiate their demands for a pay increase.

"Housing Vs. Cohen"

Prod. by Challenge for Change Parallel Institute. A poor people's housing action against a Montreal landlord.

"Sit-In at St. Denis" (2 reels)

A Montreal Welfare Rights action.

"Drumheller Report"

Prod. by Challenge for Change. NFBC. A community organizer uses video in a poor examining town in Alberta, Canada. The people get it together.

"Women's Theater & Dance"

Upstate Womens Liberation Conference

"Women's Work" (8 min. 20 sec.)

Prod. by Presbytery's Task Force on Women. Presented at the gaming session of the Presbytery's task forces.

"Presbytery Gaming"

Tape of people viewing "Women's Work."

ATTICA & PRISON REFORM

"Arthur Eve: A Point of Fact"

N.Y.S. Assemblyman, Chairman of the Attica Observers' Committee, speaking before the Roch. UAW Fair Employment Practices Committee.

"David Levin on Attica"

"Minister Raymond Scott on Attica"

"3 Attica Inmates"

1 Black & 2 White talk on conditions at Attica

"Herm Schwartz: Attica in Context"

Buffalo lawyer speaks of inmates cases before & after rebellion & of prison conditions in general.

"Jim Watson... Attica"

National Guardsman describes brutality at Attica.

"N.Y.S. Conference on Prison Reform in Binghamton" more Attica material will be available shortly, including conversations with ex-inmates who were at Attica during the rebellion.

CATV

"Cable-TV Hearings"

Monroe County Legislature's Committee to study Cable-TV: "Arts & Minority Groups."

"Local Pot-Pourri"

Excerpts from tapes by early Media Equipment Pool users shown the County Legislature's Committee on cable TV.

"Copy of CRTC Master" (NFBC)

A video brief by Challenge for Change to the Canadian Radio & TV Commission advocating local community programming on Cable TV.

"Cable in Binghamton"

A talk with Binghamton's Cable TV Program Dir.

INFORMATIONAL

"Atkinson School."

An open elementary school.

"Life in School"

Forman Center Satellite School.

"Madison County Crafts Fair"

Prod. by the Videofreex Inc.

"Pre-Historic Iroquois Site"

A dig by the RMSC archaeologists and students in the Bristol Hills.

"Ceramic Lead Poisoning" (WXXI's "let the Buyer Beware")

Dr. Michael Klein & Judy Braiman.

RESTRICTED (requests for tapes in this category will be referred to the producers.)

"Gay Women" (3 reels)

GLF women's caucus rap with Women's Liberation.